



Connecticut
Early Childhood
Alliance

**Testimony of Merrill Gay in support of Senate Bill 932
AN ACT CONCERNING THE STAFF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIREMENT FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS.**

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 932. My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

This bill would do push back the deadline for achieving the goal of having a teacher with a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood or a related field working in every classroom funded through Connecticut's School Readiness preschool program and the state funded Child Development Centers. For the veterans of the Education Committee this may feel like you're in the movie Groundhog Day because we've done this before. Originally, the deadline was 2010, then 2015, currently its 2023 and here we are again facing the reality that it needs to be pushed back again.

Why is this goal so hard to meet? In a word - **Compensation**. Early Educators are some of the lowest paid workers in the economy. Teachers in the publicly funded early childhood programs get paid a little better than in many of the private child care programs but you will hear from many teachers today that they struggle to make ends meet. There is typically a \$10,000 to \$15,000 difference between the salary of an experienced early educator and a starting kindergarten teacher right out of college. After ten years the kindergarten teacher will make double what the early educator earns.

As a society we have long undervalued the people who care for and educate our youngest children. Through relatively recent advances in medical technology and brain science, we are learning about the incredibly rapid brain development that takes place in those first few years of life. We are also learning about the profound impact that a highly skilled teacher can have during those early years. A well trained teacher not only knows how to plan lessons and keep a classroom full of children engaged but also understands child development, how to observe children and develop individual plans for each child.



We all believe in the importance of well trained teachers working with our most vulnerable young children, but until we solve the compensation problem, we're not going to achieve the important goal of a Bachelor's level teacher in every classroom. I ask you to see this bill as part of a package of bills that attacks the shortage of BA level teachers from several different angles.

Senate Bill 931 would raise the per child rate paid to School Readiness program and Child Development Centers and require that those extra funds be used increase teacher salaries. Senate Bill 934 would allow parents to use Care4Kids so that they can pursue post secondary education. To reach the goal of a BA teacher in every classroom, many of the current staff will need to go back to school and many of them are parents who will need childcare while they are in class and studying. Senate Bill 937 would provide student loan forgiveness to early educators for ten years if they continue working in the field. Finally this bill would provide the system more time so that the cumulative impact of all of these bills can take effect. If we don't push back the deadline the alternative is mass non-compliance leaving the Office of Early Childhood with the choice of looking the other way or defunding non compliant programs which would severely impact the supply of early care and preschool.